

# PORTAGE



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"THE CONSTITUTION—THE SAFEGUARD OF OUR FEDERAL COMPACT."—James K. Polk.

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### SPEECH OF HON. A. G. THURMAN, OF OHIO,

IN RELATION TO THE MEXICAN WAR,  
AND IN REPLY TO MESSRS. GIDDINGS,  
TILDEN, AND DELANO. DELIVERED IN  
THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, U.  
S. MAY 14, 1846.

The bill making appropriations for the support of the Army being under consideration in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union—

Mr. THURMAN said:  
There have been sentiments, Mr. Chairman, expressed on this floor during the present session, by representatives from the State of Ohio, which furnish to any member from that State, who rises to repel them, an ample excuse for occupying the time of the Committee. There have been sentiments attributed to the people of that State, by certain of her own representatives in this hall, which her other representatives, who do not believe that such sentiments are thus entertained, cannot, consistently with duty, suffer to pass unnoticed. And it is therefore, Mr. Chairman, that while I do not assume to speak for the State, I do, as one of her representatives, who has the right to speak for his immediate constituency at least, and as one of her citizens who, as such, may properly express his belief in reference to the views of her entire people, he leaves to say that, in my judgment, she has been greatly misunderstood and most strangely misrepresented by the gentlemen to whom I refer.

The first example to which I allude, the attention of the committee is to be found in a speech delivered by the member from the Georgia district (Mr. GIDDINGS) on the 5th of January last, when the Oregon question was under discussion. In that speech the member alluded to, after expressing his opinion that taking possession of the whole of Oregon by the United States would be followed by a war with England—after saying that "Under these circumstances he (Mr. GIDDINGS) must choose between a war with England on the one hand, and a wretched, inglorious submission to the slaveholding power on the other," that he had "seen enough of war to form an idea of the suffering it brings upon a nation;" that he had "witnessed its devastating effects upon public morals, and the consequent misery which it inflicts upon those who are doomed to feel its curse;" that "yet, with all its horrors, revolting as they are to the feelings of humanity, he preferred meeting it for a few years rather than see the people of the free States sit down in quiet indifference under the control of the slaveholding power;" that "in case of war, they (the slaves of the southern Atlantic States) will be more dangerous than four times their number of foreign enemies;" that "we are all aware that in 1789 South Carolina sent a special delegation to the Continental Congress, informing that body that it required all her troops to protect the people against their slaves, and that this chivalrous State must depend upon her northern sisters to defend her against the common enemy;" that "these scenes will again be acted if we should engage in another war;" that he (Mr. G.) was "fully aware that the southern portion of the Union must suffer most in case of war"—after promising all this, that member, speaking of the southern delegation in Congress, uttered the following language, which I will think the Clerk to read:

[Mr. T. here sent to the Clerk's desk a pamphlet copy of Mr. Giddings' speech, from which the Clerk read the following extract:]

"They now see difficulties before them; dangers present themselves to the further pursuit of their plan of territorial aggrandizement. They have suddenly called to mind the declaration of British statesmen, that 'a war with the United States will be a war of emancipation.' They see in prospect the black regiments of the British West India islands landing among them, and their slaves flocking to the enemy's standard. Servile insurrections torment their imaginations; rapine, blood, and murder dance before their afflicted visions. They now seem in every part of the Hall, calling on Whigs and Democrats to save them from the dreadful consequences of their own policy. Well, sir, I reply to them—This is your policy, not ours. You have forced us into a general war, and our almost opposition you have prepared

the poisoned chalice, and we will press it to your lips until you swallow the very dregs.

"I would not be understood as desiring a servile insurrection; but I say to southern gentlemen that there are hundreds of thousands of honest and patriotic men, who will laugh at your calamity, and will mock when your fear cometh. If blood and massacre should mark the struggle for liberty of those who for ages have been oppressed and degraded, my prayer to the God of Heaven shall be, that justice—eternal unyielding justice—may be awarded to both master and slave. I desire that every human being may enjoy the rights which the God of nature has endowed him. If those rights can be regained by the down-trodden sons of Africa in our southern States by quiet and peaceful means, I hope they will pursue such peaceful measures. But if they cannot regain their God-given rights by peaceful measures, I nevertheless hope they will regain them; and blood be shed, I should certainly hope that it might be the blood of those who stand between them and freedom, and not the blood of those who have long been robbed of their wives and children and all they hold dear in life. It is true, that when those scenes shall occur, northern freemen, our sons and neighbors, must march to Texas, and bare their breasts to the shafts of battle, in a soul-degrading defence of slavery. In such a cause who would not be a coward? Our fathers fought for the inalienable rights of man; our sons must face the cannon's mouth in defence of slavery. Should the black regiments of the West Indies land upon our southern coast, and freemen of the North will be placed in a position the contemplation of which is most revolting to the feelings of humanity. For the people of the free North to march to our southern States, and stand between the emancipated slaves of the West Indies and southern slaveholders, and defend them while they flag their bondmen into submission, will be degradation without a parallel, except it be found in the quiet submission of our people to the political control of those who buy and sell their fellow-man, and make merchandise of human flesh.

"Should the scenes to which I have alluded take place, one great advantage would result. Perhaps no statesman doubts that a war with England must prove the death of slavery. The British Government now have no slaves in their West India islands, as in the last war, to restrain them from raising the flag of emancipation. The paralyzing effects which that institution exerts upon the physical energies of the nation would be exhibited to the world. Our people of the North would be constrained to look upon the evil as it really is.

"The slave power would lose its charm—our citizens of the North would be aroused from the lethargy which, for half a century, has held their sensibilities in a torpid inactivity toward the oppressed of our land. We should then find means to sever the cords which have so long, unconsciously, bound us to the putrescent carcass of slavery. Great Britain would not be likely to pay southern slaveholders twelve hundred thousand dollars for human cattle, who shall have strayed from their owners, as was done at the close of the last war."

Now, (said Mr. THURMAN,) with the individual opinions of the author of these sentiments I have nothing to do. He may entertain them, atrocious as they are. He may desire to see all the horrors he depicts in preference to what he calls the indifference of the free States "to the control of the 'slaveholding power,'" in other words, in preference to the existing state of things. He may pray that in a servile war, the blood of the white man, and not of the negro, may be shed; that the relatives or descendants of Washington and Sumpter and Marion; of Jefferson and Madison and Lee, of Monroe and of Jackson, may fall in the contest; fall by the hand of the slave who come to them by inheritance, without their choice and without their fault. In such a consummation he may find cause for rejoicing. In the defence of his fellow citizens of the South he may choose to "be a coward." At their "calamity" he may "laugh," and "mock when their fear cometh." He may think it "degradation" to repel British troops if they be black, and land on a southern shore. He may refuse to defend the soil of his country or the lives of her citizens in war. All this he may do. These may be his sentiments; I will not deny that they are. Let him revel in them if he can. I shall not undertake to disturb his enjoyment. I am content to leave him to his fate. But, sir, if he mean to assert that these are the sentiments of the people of Ohio, or of any considerable portion of that people; if he mean to affirm that thousands, much less "hundreds of thousands" of her citizens entertain such views, I here declare that the assertion is as unfounded as a slander as ever fell from the lips of man. Nothing could be further from the truth; nothing whatever. There is not a State in

the Republic more sincerely attached to the Union than is Ohio; not one in which the obligations it imposes are held in greater respect; not one in which they are, and ever will be, more sacredly fulfilled. Her people it will never be said, with truth, that they are indifferent to the calamities of any portion of their fellow citizens. Nor will any quarter of the country ever call on her for aid in the hour of danger, and call in vain.

Passing from this first example, Mr. Chairman, I proceed to the consideration of some remarks made by another member from Ohio, my colleague from Ravenna (Mr. TILDEN). The bill to raise two regiments of riflemen for the protection of our citizens migrating to Oregon, being under consideration on the 24th of March last, that gentleman said, that "if he could convince himself that such was the object or design of the bill, he should undoubtedly feel bound to give it his sincere and hearty support. But he did not believe it; he did not believe it had any such object; he did not believe that such had been its original design, much less that it was so at that time;" that "he looked upon this as an effort on the part of the Administration to raise these two regiments of riflemen (to be officered according to the views of the gentleman from Arkansas, (Mr. YELL,) by western gentlemen, experienced in Indian warfare) to conciliate the great Western Democracy for the disappointment they had undergone by the failure to carry out their views in relation to the Northwestern boundary;" that, as to the emigrants to Oregon, "there was no necessity to justify this outlay of public money to give protection to these emigrants. There was something behind the scenes that had not been disclosed. The emigrants wanted no protection; they never had asked for it;" that, so far "as the Western frontier was concerned, he believed there was already a sufficient force there;" that "he had no doubt that the President, and those who sympathized and were in the closest connection with him, were in earnest in raising these two regiments;" that one of the President's objects was "to augment the force now in Texas. Was the House prepared to carry out this purpose? For his (Mr. TILDEN's) own part, he declared solemnly, that never, until the State of Ohio, by some act of hers, should revoke the resolutions of her legislature, passed by the unanimous vote of the Whig and Democratic party, declaring that the annexation of Texas was a violation of the Constitution of the country, and that, as such, she would never be bound by it, would he sanction or sustain that purpose. Never until Ohio should wipe out that record, would he consent to this grand system of national marauding;" that "if he (Mr. TILDEN) had understood correctly, it was intended to increase the army (of observation, or of occupation) which was this day occupying a territory to which, according to the highest Democratic authority at the other end of the Capitol, we had no more title than we had to Great Britain—a territory where our citizens were now paying duties on their goods to the Mexican Government—a territory to which honorable gentlemen on this floor had declared that we had no title. For himself, [Mr. TILDEN] he would see this Capitol razed to its foundation before he would vote for such a proceeding; and in saying this, he believed that he spoke the sentiments of the people of Ohio;" that "he was resolved to go against this bill in every form in which it could be presented, unless the State of Ohio shall revoke the resolutions to which he had referred. Whenever that State, by any act of hers, should convince him that she had repudiated those resolutions, then, and not before, he would be prepared to go for an army of occupation in Texas;" that "he knew that so long as slavery existed in Texas, so long there would be cause of war between this country and the contiguous territory;" that "whenever the people of this State should give their sanction to this outrage, then, and not before, he [Mr. TILDEN] would vote in favor of this and other kindred measures."

Now, sir, [said Mr. THURMAN,] what is the sum and substance of these remarks of my colleague? Why, sir, that while he was willing to vote for raising two regiments of troops to protect our emigrants to Oregon, although, in his judgment, they needed no protection, he was unwilling to furnish a single man for the defence of Texas, however great the danger to which she was exposed; that while he would raise troops to be placed on our Western frontier, where "he believed there was already a sufficient force," he would see this Capitol razed to its foundation before he would vote to increase our army on the Rio Grande; and that "in saying this, he believed that he spoke the sentiments of the people of Ohio."

Mr. Chairman, I deny that these are the sentiments of the people of Ohio. I deny that they are the views of either of the two great parties in that State. I deny that

the people of Ohio regard Texas as no part of this Republic. I deny that they consider her a foreign power, or that they are any more unwilling to provide for her defence than they are to defend any other State of the Union. That some portion of the abolitionists of Ohio entertain the sentiments expressed by my colleague, I have not the least doubt. That he has correctly represented their feelings, I grant to be true. But that he has represented the feelings of the people of that State, or of either of her great parties, Democratic or Whig, I utterly deny. Why, sir, when was it my colleague addressed to this House the remarks I have quoted? It was the 24th of March last, sir; almost nine months after the people of Texas had accepted our terms of annexation, and nearly four months after she had, by an overwhelming vote of this very Congress, been admitted as one of the States of this Union. Yes, sir, after this, and when her State legislature was sitting under her State constitution—when her Senators in Congress were on their way to this our national seat of Government to take their places in the other end of this Capitol, my colleague has the boldness to maintain, that she is no part of the United States, and entitled to no support, defence, or protection from our arms. No vote of his, he says, shall be given to defend her, until Ohio shall have revoked her anti-annexation resolves. And does my colleague really believe, that the people of our State are influenced at this day, under the now existing state of things, by the resolutions of their legislature passed years ago, when all parties in this country thought that Texas ought not then to be annexed—resolutions passed at a time when, owing to circumstances that no longer exist, it was clearly inexpedient to annex her? Or, does he suppose that the resolves of 1815—passed, not unanimously, but by a party vote—passed, not after, but before, annexation was accepted by even the Congress of the United States, does he suppose that those resolves, adopted under those circumstances, are so sacred in the eyes of the people of Ohio—are of such binding obligation on her representatives here, that now—now, when annexation is consummated—now, when Texas has been formally admitted into the Union as a State—now, when her Senators are sitting and voting in the other end of the Capitol, we, of Ohio, ought to treat her as a foreign power—ought to refuse to have any connexion with her, and leave her a prey to an exasperated and vindictive foe? Does he really think that these are the sentiments of those we represent? Does he honestly believe that this is what is expected of us on this floor? If he do, Mr. Chairman, there never was man more grossly deceived—never, sir, never. Sooner or later will he find out, that when annexation was completed, opposition to it should have ceased; that Texas annexed, is quite a different thing from Texas a foreign State; that if the latter could claim only our good wishes and sympathy, the former is entitled, in the eloquent language of another, "to be defended with all our hearts and by all our hands."

Mr. Chairman, it was yesterday announced to this House, in the usual form, that the bill that had passed both branches of Congress, recognising the existence of war between this country and Mexico, had been approved and signed by the President of the United States; and that, therefore, whatever doubts had theretofore been entertained on the subject, war did now exist, both in contemplation of law and in fact. Less than an hour after this announcement was made, a member from Ohio, representing the Mount Vernon district, (Mr. DELANO,) was addressing the House. The subject under consideration was a bill making appropriations for the support of the army. Now, Mr. Chairman, could the people of Ohio have been aware of these facts, what do you suppose would have been their speculations as to the character of the speech to which their representative was giving utterance? I think, sir, I can answer this question. I think, sir, I may safely imagine ninety-nine out of every hundred of that people saying to themselves something like this: "So, war is upon us. Its existence cannot be denied. It exists, beyond dispute, both in law and in fact. The blood of our citizens has been shed. Our soldiers have been killed or captured by Mexican troops. Our army is assailed by superior force. All that men, brave and patriotic, can do, will be done by it. But it needs our aid—our instant and powerful aid. Volunteers must be raised to march to its assistance. Regular troops must also be enlisted. The energies of the nation must be put forth, that the war may be brief, decisive, and glorious; that the peace that follow it may be honorable, advantageous, and permanent. Different opinions may be entertained as to what has produced this war. In the judgments of some, our own Government may be to blame. But this is not the time to be finding fault with it. It is not in a crisis like

this that such a judgment should be pronounced. It is not in the very beginning of a contest with an enemy that we should lessen our own moral force. It is no time now to tell the world that we are the aggressors. Success in war does not depend on arms alone in this age of the world. We have other enemies, and powerful enemies too beside the Mexicans—enemies who will gladly seize on every thing that seems to put us in the wrong. We must not furnish them with argument against us—arguments that would derive their chief weight from being first uttered by us. Above all, must we not dishearten our own people, and exalt the spirits of our foes. We must encourage, not discourage, enlistments. We must increase, not repress, the ardor of our countrymen. Did we even know with certainty that our Government is to blame, this would yet be our duty. How much more strongly is it our duty when we cannot say that our Government is in the wrong? We have received numberless injuries from Mexico. For a long series of years has she plundered and imprisoned our citizens. Year after year has she refused to reimburse them what she admitted herself to owe. Again and again has she violated her treaty engagements with us. All intercourse between the two nations has been broken off by her. She has withdrawn her minister from our country, and expelled its ministers from hers. She has perished in her claim to Texas after it had been nearly ten years independent of her power. She has thus persisted out of hostility to us, for she offered to acknowledge the independence of that country if it would reject annexation to the United States. We have offered her peace, and, in return, she has threatened to invade our territory. We have abstained from declaring war against her, as we might justly have done, and the recompense for our forbearance has been the murder of our people. The first blood that was shed was the blood of an American citizen. The hand that shed it was the hand of a Mexican soldier. With these facts before us, shall we prematurely pronounce judgment on ourselves? Can we truly say, in the face of these facts, that our Government has done wrong? How could it have acted otherwise than it has if it meant to perform its duty of upholding the rights and maintaining the honor of the nation? Will there be found any among us seeking to make a little paltry, party capital, by throwing the blame of the war upon the President? Will the scenes of 1812, and '13, and '14, be revived, and an attempt be again made to try, judge and condemn an administration in the midst of a war, on the charge that on it, and not on the enemy, rests the responsibility of producing the war? We hope not. We believe not. We trust that the lessons of experience have not been taught in vain. We see that Congress has acted, so far, promptly; and we rejoice to see it. We hear that it has acted with almost unanimity; and we are gratified to hear it. Some few, it appears, voted as if their country was in the wrong. We are glad to learn their number was so small. We trust that no representative of ours was among them. Ohio was unanimous in the late war; we would be grieved and ashamed were she divided in this. One of our representatives is now on the floor addressing the House of which is a member. The bill under discussion is to provide army supplies. The subject debated relates, therefore, to the war. Doubtless the voice of our representative is heard on the side of his country. Doubtless he is exerting his talents and eloquence (and he is eloquent and talented) to give strength, not only physical but moral, to his Government in the strife. Doubtless his arguments will convince many an one of the justice of our cause; his cheering words, of patriotic encouragement, induce many an one to volunteer in our defence. We are glad, heartily glad, that he is speaking for us and his country to day.

Such, Mr. Chairman, I believe would have been the language of the people of Ohio, in the case I have supposed. But, alas, sir, they would have been sadly, sadly mistaken. Could the voice of their representative have reached their homes—instead of hearing him vindicate his country in the conflict, they would have heard him loudly accuse its President of having wantonly and wickedly produced the war; instead of hearing him speak of it as a contest in defence of our rights, they would have heard him denounce it as a war of aggrandizement and plunder on our part; instead of hearing him treat it as a struggle forced upon us against our will, they would have heard him declare it a war unconsciously made by our Chief Magistrate; instead of hearing him maintain that justice is upon the side of his own nation, they would have heard him affirm and repeat that she is prosecuting an 'unrighteous, unholty, and damnable war;' instead of hearing him utter words of encouragement to the volunteer, they would have heard him describe the scene of action as a vast charnel

house of death; instead of hearing him anticipate triumphant results, they would have heard him dwell on the cost of the war, the destruction of life. True, they would have heard him loudly declare, that he would support his country right or wrong; but coming as the declaration did, in the midst of assaults upon his own Government—arguments against his country's claims, and forebodings of the gloomiest, saddest kind, they would have stood amazed at such a support.

Mr. Chairman, I did sincerely hope when I saw the declaration of the existence of war adopted by a vote of 174 to 14 in this House, and 40 to 2 in the Senate, that we should be spared a recurrence of the disgraceful scenes of the late war. I did hope that the 'peace-party' men of that day would have no imitators now. These hopes I did most truly entertain. But, sir, unwilling as I am to believe it, reluctant as I am to admit the fact, passing events compel me to fear that my hopes were premature, were probably vain. I fear that the same denunciations hurled against the war of 1812, are to be reiterated against the present war—that the same vituperation that then assailed Mr. Madison, is now to fall on Mr. Polk. Between the language of the 'peace-party' of that period, and that of the anti-war party of the present day, there is a wonderful similarity. It is hardly too much to say that they are almost identical. A recurrence to the old federal speeches and journals will show the justice of this remark. Let us make a brief comparison. It shall be a brief one. What are the charges brought by my colleague against the present war, and the present Administration? Substantially, I understand them to be as follows:

1. That the war is, on the part of our Government, a dishonest war.  
Now, what did the peace party of the late war say of it? An extract from the Boston 'Gazette,' of 1814, a leading federal paper published at Boston, Massachusetts, may serve to show. The extract is as follows:

"It is very grateful to find that the universal sentiment is, that any man who loans money to the government at the present time, will forfeit all claim to common honesty and common courtesy, among all true friends of the country!! GOD FORBID THAT ANY FEDERALIST SHOULD HOLD UP HIS HEAD TO PAY FEDERALISTS FOR MONEY LENT TO THE PRESENT REGIMEN; and federalists can judge whether DEMOCRATS will tax their constituents to pay interest to federalists!!"

So the peace party of the late war affirmed, it would seem, that a man who should then loan money to the Government would 'forfeit all claim to common honesty'—the war was so dishonest!

My colleague would not go thus far I know. He is willing, as I understand him, to vote for supplies. He would loan his money, I dare say, to the Government. He is doubtless a friend to the union of the States. In these things he differs from the federalists of old. But then, forsooth, there is a striking analogy between them. The charges they make have a striking resemblance. The epithets they use are almost always the same. The tendencies of their acts differ only in degree. Both tend to weaken their Government—both tend to destroy its moral force—both tend to subject it to disgrace—both tend to put their country in the wrong—both tend to bring upon it the condemnation of the world—both tend to paralyze its efforts—both tend to inspire the foe.

2. The second charge of my colleague is, that the war is a 'Presidential war'—made by the President without warrant of law—unnecessarily and unconstitutionally made. It is Mr. Polk, he thinks, who began the war. It is through his misdeeds it occurred at all. He is the man who brought it about. Our 'preamble' tells an abominable lie. It says that Mexico began the war. Mexico did not begin it. So my colleague thinks and declares.

It would be very easy, Mr. Chairman, to show how greatly my colleague errs. But the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. Douglas) has already done that. It would be useless in me to repeat his remarks. I therefore content myself with showing some precedents for the charge. Among many to be seen, the following may do. First, a Resolution of a Federal convention, in Massachusetts, passed the 14th of July, 1812, in the following words:

Resolved, That our rulers (James Madison, &c.) have prostituted our national character, sacrificed our vital interests, and finally involved us, unprepared, in the calamities of war."

Next, an address of another Federal convention, held at Boston, Massachusetts, August 6th, 1812, from which I read as follows: "In an evil hour, Mr. Jefferson gained the Presidential chair. Our country, then prosperous, has been grievously oppressed by ruinous commercial restrictions, which, for many years have been wantonly imposed